

Botanical Illustration Supply List & Recommendations

This is a list of supplies that we used or discussed in class. I include a lot of my own personal preferences as well as a few links to product reviews that other artists have created. This document should not be interpreted as Madison Audubon endorsing products! I would be happy to answer any questions you have about supplies- reach out to me through email (carolyn.byers@madisonaudubon.org) or by calling the office (608-255-BIRD).

If you would like to connect on social media, you can find me on instagram @greensparrowarts Join me in this year's [InkTober](#) challenge. Set your own goal & make ink drawings to share!

Happy arting,
Carolyn

Things we actually used in class:

[Micron pens](#): they come in various sizes and colors, but we used an 01 in black. I love using these pens. They don't typically bleed through the paper. They are permanent and waterproof, so you can erase pencil lines after using the pens and they won't bleed if you add watercolor on top of them.

[6B graphite pencils](#): we used these 6B's for the softer pencil, and a #2 for our harder sketching pencil. Remember a #2 is an HB pencil, and fairly hard. Softer pencils make darker lines if you're using the same amount of pressure as you draw.

Watercolor paper: [cotton, cold press, 94lbs](#). Remember, cold press is a bumpier paper with more tooth- excellent for drawing with softer pencils, pastel, or watercolor. Hot press watercolor paper will have a smoother finish, and will give you crisper lines for pen. 94lbs is pretty thin paper. Thicker paper like 140lbs will be better for watercolor, and 300lb paper is outstanding.

[Newsprint](#): extremely thin paper used for quick sketches.

[Kneaded erasers](#): great for erasing in large or small areas, since you can mold it to the shape you like. Can also be used to lighten areas, since you can press the eraser into the paper and lift pigment. "clean" the eraser by kneading the dark areas into the center.

Supplies for a low-budget starter kit for drawing in the field:

- 1) Sketchbook. Consider what your feelings are on size, spiral vs book binding, type of paper, hard vs soft cover, and paper brightness. Generally I like smaller hardcover bound sketchbooks with watercolor paper close to bright white. Usually watercolor sketchbooks are cold press paper around 90-140lbs, and this works well for me.
- 2) Pencils. Start with HB (#2), 2B, 4B, and 6B, add more as you like.
- 3) Eraser. Kneaded are wonderful, as are art gum and plastic erasers.
- 4) Pencil sharpener. More expensive ones really do work better (up to a point, I'm sure. Get it?! Up to a POINT?). [This one is pretty good](#).
- 5) A bag to keep it all in.

Bonus materials:

- 6) A clear ruler: I like a small 6 inch one
- 7) Compass, for drawing circles
- 8) Something to add color (see below for colored pencil & watercolor recommendations.)
- 9) if you're using loose paper, you'll want some kind of surface to work on. They make clipboards of varying sizes (some are huge) that are very useful.

Adding color:**Watercolors**

Student grade watercolors are perfect for getting started. You can explore the medium before shelling out a lot of money for a professional quality set. I used the [Winsor & Newton Cotman](#) (cotman = student grade) set for quite a while. There are a lot of great student grade options to choose from.

Professional grade watercolors are archival and light-fast, so they won't fade as much with time. They also behave a bit differently than the student grade watercolors. Watercolors come in pans or tubes. "Pans" are dried watercolor paint in a small well, generally with 12-20 of them in a travel palette. You add water to reactivate them, and transfer that to your mixing palette or paper. Tubes of watercolor are basically the consistency of toothpaste. You squeeze out a bit onto your palette and it's ready for mixing or painting. In my opinion, pans are better for working in the field. It's more economical in the long run to buy tubes of paint, empty pans, and make your own travel pans. [Youtube review on pans vs tubes.](#)

The three major brands of professional quality watercolors are Winsor and Newton, M. Graham, and Daniel Smith. From what little research I've done, M. Graham is the cheapest, but remains tacky when to put it into pans. If you're working mostly in a studio, this won't be a problem, but it's not ideal in the field. Daniel Smith is really fantastic- I love the way their paint behaves, great pigment and cool textures. However, when their paint dries in pans, it shrinks and cracks, often falling out of the pans. For this reason, I use mostly Winsor and Newton in my travel case.

Brushes

Synthetic brushes are good for use in the field. The bristles are strong, and can hold up to rough use. Natural sable brushes are more delicate, more expensive, but do hold their point and paint better. Here is a [cheap Koi brand synthetic brush](#), and a [Sable travel brush](#). I have both, but honestly use the synthetic brush more. Not necessarily because it holds water (I often bring a bowl to dip into anyway) but because I don't need to worry about hurting the brush as I use it or if I drop it.

Water wells

[Collapsible dog dishes](#) work great! Remember to bring some paper towels or a cloth to dab your paintbrush on.

Paper

Arches watercolor paper is my favorite. Hot or cold press, generally at least 100lbs. It's a bit more expensive, but worth it if you're already spending the money to use higher end paint.

Colored Pencils

Again, there are lots of student grade & professional grade options out there. I brought some [woodless colored pencils](#) to the classes. There are also watercolored pencils that are fun to play with (color with them like usual colored pencils, then add a wash of water with a brush and they blend!)

Prismacolor or Faber Castell are the two leading professional quality brands. Prisma are wax based and FC are oil based. You can find a great review of the products here: [Lachri Fine Art](#). In the review, the artist is a little down on Prismacolor-- I agree that Faber Castell are better, but Prismas are really great if you're working with them as a hobby and not your profession. I would recommend buying a 12 or [24 pack of Prismas](#) to start with. That won't break the bank, but it will give you enough colors to work with and mix with.

Hot press watercolor paper will work really well for colored pencils, especially if you will be using Lachri's technique of blending with odorless paint thinner. Again, check out her [YouTube stream](#) for tons of tutorials.

Other mediums to consider for work in the field:

Pastel (oil or chalk), watercolor pencils, charcoal (pencil, compressed, vine), conte, ink.

Where to shop?

Online: Amazon, of course, and [Jerry's Artarama](#)

Stores: JoAnn's or Michaels will have most of the student grade supplies, as well as some professional. They also have excellent prices. If you're looking for an amazing selection of art supplies paired with talented and helpful staff, [Artist & Craftsman Supply](#) is the way to go. There is a Madison store just off of State Street that has excellent sales at the start of each semester. You can find them at 203 West Gorham St.

Youtube Resources

[Mind of Watercolor](#): everything from supply advice & reviews to tutorials on mixing colors and different techniques. He often brings in guest artists too.

[Lachri Fine Art](#): this artist works mostly with colored pencils, but has some tutorials for paint & pastel as well.

[Angela Fehr](#): watercolor tutorials- great stuff for beginners.
books

Books to check out at the Library:

[Botanical Illustration Course by Martin & Thurstan](#)

[Laws Guide to Nature Drawing and Journaling by Laws](#)

[Botanical Portraits with Colored Pencil by Swan](#)

Other Inspiration:

[Lara Gastinger's perpetual journal](#)